



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

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News Release

ISRAELI NATIONAL TIED TO MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR L.A. ECSTASY RING ARRESTED IN SOUTH AFRICA

LOS ANGELES— An Israeli national who owns a game farm in South Africa is facing extradition to the United States after being arrested earlier this week in Johannesburg for his role in an international drug ring that allegedly imported millions of doses of the club drug “Ecstasy” from Europe into the United States.

Meir Elran (a.k.a. Meir Elran Ben Hamo), 38, was taken into custody Friday on narcotics smuggling and money laundering charges by the South African Police Service based on an arrest warrant issued in Los Angeles last year.

The charges stem from Operation Money Man, a joint international undercover operation involving U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Santa Monica Police Department, and Austrian and Czech authorities. As a result of Operation Money Man, authorities here have seized more than 300,000 doses of Ecstasy (3,4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA) with a street value of nearly \$7 million.

Elran is the fourteenth defendant arrested so far as part of the probe that began in March 2002 when ICE agents learned that a group comprised primarily of Israeli nationals were trafficking Ecstasy in the Los Angeles area. The investigation quickly focused on Eliyahu Marciano, the head of an organization that imported Ecstasy from Europe with help from associates in the Czech Republic.

“Elran and the others involved in this ring trafficked Ecstasy and laundered their profits through bank fraud and real estate transactions,” said Loraine Brown, special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Los Angeles. “This investigation demonstrates the global reach of federal law enforcement to take drugs off the street and seize the profits from these criminal networks.”

Over the last year, investigators believe the European ring shipped more than one million Ecstasy tablets from the Czech Republic to the United States. Criminal complaints filed in federal court in Los Angeles allege that Marciano and co-conspirators laundered drug trafficking proceeds through loan fraud and real estate transactions.

Throughout the investigation, American law enforcement received substantial support from the Austrian National Police, the Czech National Police, and the Israeli National Police.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.